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221546Z Mar 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000495

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. DELISI, L. AROIAN, M. RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2009
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL ZI
SUBJECT: "DELIVER US FROM EVIL": NATIONAL PRAYER EVENT SET
FOR MARCH 27

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b), (d)

¶1. (U) Involving broad participation from leading clerics around the country, an ecumenical day of prayer is being planned for March 27. Under a banner "Deliver Us From Evil" in a March 21 advertisement in the independent weekly Standard, the Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference and Christians Together for Peace and Justice invited the public to two events -- a two-hour session at the City Sport Center in Harare and a three-hour event at St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Bulawayo. The announcement states that prayers would be offered for open political dialogue, political stability, good rains and food for all, real peace and prosperity for all, HIV/AIDS, truth justice and reconciliation, violent free democratic society, new and old farmers, and end to corruption, and free and fair elections.

¶2. (C) The event has been planned quietly for months. Clerics involved have told us that the participation has been wired down to the congregation level and they expect participation from church leaders throughout the region, including clerics from South Africa, Kenya, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana. Catholic Bishop Pius Ncube told the Ambassador March 22 that the organizers were undecided on whether to march from the Catholic Cathedral to the Anglican Cathedral in Bulawayo. He said he had argued strongly against it, noting that such a march would violate draconian anti-assembly laws and give the GOZ pretense to arrest or even commit violence against the throng. He asserted that they would be safe in the cathedral and said he thought a permit had been obtained for the Harare event. Ncube said the organizers are planning to gauge the atmosphere of the Bulawayo crowd on March 27 and make a decision at the venue.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Assuming the meetings proceed, The Ambassador plans to attend the Harare gathering and a poloff will be present at the Bulawayo meeting. We are quietly suggesting other diplomatic missions send representatives as well. If authorities did issue a permit for the Harare event, it is quite likely they will retract it after seeing the tenor of the advertisement. Whether one or both events is held or not, their organization appears to have reached critical mass and poses a tactical challenge to GOZ. Since last June's stay-away, the GOZ has generally done whatever was necessary to stem any momentum for mass expression of dissent without regard to public relations concerns.

SULLIVAN